

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0383

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 11394

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV PINT LE

SUBJ: POSSIBLE LEBANESE CABINET CRISIS

SUMMARY: THERE IS SLIGHT POSSIBILITY THAT LEBANON'S
22-MAN "DO-NOTHING" CABINET OF PARLIAMENTARIANS
HEADED BY PRIMIN SOLH MAY AT LAST BE HEADED FOR DISSOLUTION,
OWING TO INCREASING ANTI-GOL AGITATION BY "OPPOSITIONIST"
POLITICAL LEADERS (INCLUDING THOSE REPRESENTED IN THE CABINET)
AND POTENTIALLY "UNRAVELING" PROCESS SPARKED BY WHAT MAY HAVE
BEEN A BIT OF POLITICAL FLIM-FLAM ON PART OF PRES FRANGIE
AND KAMAL JUMBLATT. END SUMARY.

1. DEPT WILL HAVE NOTED FROM FBIS REPORTS (BE 171036, 181948
AND OTHERS) THAT CONSIDERABLE INTERNAL POLITICAL
FERMENT HAS ARISEN IN LEBANON AS RESULT OF SEP 17
"DECISION" BY SOCIALIST-FEUDALIST LEADER KAMAL JUMBLATT
TO WITHDRAW HIS TWO DRUZE FOLLOWERS, MININTERIOR BAHIJ
TAKIEDDINE AND MINPETROLEUM TOUFIC ASSAF, FROM 22-MAN
CABINET OF PRIMIN SOLH. JUMBLATT'S DECISION STEMMED
OSTENSIBLY FROM HIS DISSATISFACTION OVER DECLINING STATE
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OF LAW AND ORDER IN LEBANON. HOWEVER, IT ALSO COINCIDED

WITH HEIGHTENED ANTI-GOL PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE CAMPAIGN BEING WAGED AGAINST SOLH GOVT'S "DO-NOTHING" POLICIES BY VARIOUS CHRISTIAN AND MOSLEM OPPOSITION BLOCS LED BY TRADITIONALIST POLICIANS PIERRE GEMAYEL AND CAMILLE CHAMOUN, RAYMOND EDDE, AND RASHID KARAME AND SAEB SALAM-- AS WELL AS WITH CONTINUING ANTI-GOL AGITATION BEING FOMENTED BY CHARISMATIC SHIITE IMAM MUSA AS SADR.

2. ALTHOUGH BOTH MINISTERS "FROZE" THEIR RESIGNATIONS FOLLOWING EMERGENCY CABINET MEETING SEP 18--IN WHICH IT WAS AGREED TO GRANT "NECESSARY POWERS" DEMANDED BY MININT TO PRESERVE LAW AND ORDER (PARTICULARLY IN RELATION TO CURTAILING ILLEGAL USE OF FIREARMS)--JUMBLATT SUBSEQUENTLY TOLD NEWSMEN THAT THIS ACTION WAS "NOT ENOUGH". IN HIS VIEW, IT WAS "NONSENSE" TO APPLY ARMS RESTRICTIONS TO INDIVIDUAL CITIZENS WITHOUT FIRST CURTAILING FLAGRANT "CRIMES BEING COMMITTED BY PRIVATE MILITIAS" SUCH AS GEMAYEL'S FALANGE, CHAMOUN'S "TIGERS" AND OTHER RIGHT-WING CHRISTIAN PARAMILITARY GROUPS. (HE CONVENIENTLY FAILED INCLUDE HIS OWN ARMED "PROGRESSIVE" AND DRUZE FOLLOWERS, AS WELL AS FEDAYEEN, IN THIS CATEGORY.) JUMBLATT ANNOUNCED THAT HIS EARLIER "DECISION" TO WITHDRAW HIS ALLIES FROM SOLH CABINET REMAINS IN FORCE, TO BE IMPLEMENTED AT SOME UNDETERMINED FUTURE DATE.

3. REGARDLESS OF WHETHER JUMBLATT'S TWO FOLLOWERS ACTUALLY RESIGN, SITUATION DESCRIBED ABOVE HAS APPARENTLY EMBOLDENED SALAM, GEMAYEL, EDDE AND CHAMOUN TO REVIEW STATUS OF THEIR LIEGE-MEN CURRENTLY SERVING AS MINISTERS IN SOLH CABINET. MINECONOMY NAZIH BIZRI (SALAM BLOC) ANNOUNCED HIS RESIGNATION LATE SEP 18, AND THERE ARE SIGNS THAT LABOR MINISTER EMILE ROUHANNA SAQR (EDDE BLOC), AS WELL AS CERTAIN CHAMOUNIST AND FALANGIST MINISTERS, MAY SOON FOLLOW SUIT. ALTHOUGH GEMAYEL HAS WARNED AGAINST DANGERS INHERENT IN "ABANDONING SHIP DURING STORM", WOULD APPEAR THAT PROCESS HAS BEEN SET IN MOTION WHICH MIGHT LEAD WILLY-NILLY TO UNRAVELING OF CABINET AND EVENTUAL DOWNFALL OF SOLH'S 14-MONTH-OLD GOVT.

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4. COMMENT: (A) ABOVE DEVELOPMENTS MARK FIRST SIGN OF MAJOR TROUBLE WITHIN SOLH CABINET SINCE IT WAS FORMED IN JULY 1973 FOLLOWING LEBANESE ARMY CLASHES WITH FEDAYEEN AND SUBSEQUENT MOSLEM OUTCRY OVER THEIR ALLEGED LACK OF ADEQUATE "PARTICIPATION" IN LEBANESE GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE. FACT THAT SALAM, GEMAYEL, CHAMOUN AND EDDE HAVE PERMITTED CERTAIN OF THEIR FOLLOWERS TO HOLD MINISTERIAL PORT-FOILIOS IN SOLH CABINET HAS NOT PREVENTED THEM FROM LAUNCHING

OPPORTUNIST ATTACKS AGAINST GOL AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY,
BUT UNTIL RECENTLY THEIR OPPOSITION HAS LACKED BOTH COHESION
AND EFFECTIVENESS. IN RECENT DAYS, HOWEVER, WE
HAVE SEEN INDICATIONS THAT THEY HAVE BECOME MORE UNIFIED--
FOR TIME BEING AT LEAST AND FOR A BEWILDERING VARIETY OF
REASONS--IN CONCERTED EFFORT TO BRING DOWN PRIMIN SOLH.

(B) THERE IS CONSIDERABLE EVIDENCE THAT PRES FRANGIE--
WHO CANNOT HAVE BEEN OBLIVIOUS TO GREATER EFFORTS BEING
MADE BY CHAMOUN, GEMAYEL, EDDE, SALAM, KARAME ET AL TO
OUST PRIMIN SOLH (AND INDIRECTLY TO RENDER FRANGIE MORE
AMENABLE TO THEIR COMBINED AND INDIVIDUAL DEMANDS)--
WAS AWARE (IF NOT ACTUALLY THE COVERT INSTIGATOR) OF
JUMBLATT'S INTENTION TO ANNOUNCE WITHDRAWAL OF HIS TWO
MINISTERS FROM THE GOVT. (WE NOTE, FOR INSTANCE, THAT
FRANGIE AND TOP PRESIDENCY OFFICIALS REACTED IN EXTREMELY
RELAXED FASHION TO JUMBLATT'S SEP 17 ANNOUNCEMENT). IN
OTHER WORDS, JUMBLATT'S ACTION COULD HAVE BEEN CLEVER
PLOY--MADE IN CAHOOTS WITH FRANGIE-- TO STRENGTHEN GOVT'S
POSITION, THROW OTHER "OPPOSITIONIST" POLITICANS INTO
DISARRAY AND FORESTALL SIMILAR ACTION ON THEIR PART TO
WITHDRAW THEIR MEN FROM CABINET.

(C) BYZANTINE INTRIQUE CHARACTERISTIC OF LEBANESE
INTERNAL POLITICS IS SUCH THAT WE MAY NEVER KNOW (MUCH
LESS FULLY UNDERSTAND) WHERE TRUTH LIES IN ALL OF THE
ABOVE. IN ANY EVENT, SEEMS CLEAR THAT SOLH CABINET--
WHICH HAS LASTED FAR LONGER THAN ANYONE WOULD HAVE
DARED PREDICT 14 MONTHS AGO--MAY BE HEADED FOR

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 11394

DISSOLUTION IN NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE. SHOULD THAT HAPPEN, THERE COULD ENSUE EVEN WILDER MANEUVERINGS AMONG POLITICAL LEADERS OF ALL STRIPES, WITH MOSLEMS (PLUS JUMBLATT) CATERING TO LEFTIST AND FEDAYEEN AMBITIONS IN EFFORT TO ENHANCE THEIR PROSPECTS FOR GAINING MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS AND WITH CHRISTIANS (PLUS IMAM SADR) HARPING ON SECURITY AND OTHER NEGLECTED ISSUES (E.G., ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT) FOR SAME PURPOSE. ON OTHER HAND, WE KNOW THAT PRIMIN SOLH IS BEING COUNSELED BY SOME MODERATE ELEMENTS TO REVISE HIS GOVT, I.E., TO SUBMIT GOVT'S RESIGNATION BUT THEN COME UP FORTHWITH WITH A RELATIVELY NEW TEAM. EVEN IN LEBANON THIS IS A DELICATE MANEUVER AND ONE THAT WOULD REQUIRE CAREFUL PLANNING AND GREAT SECRECY, BOTH OF WHICH CONDITIONS HAVE HERETOFORE BEEN RELATIVELY UNKNOWN IN THIS GOLDFISH ENVIRONMENT.

(D) FRANGIE'S OWN POSITION IS DIFFICULT TO ASCERTAIN. AS USUAL, HE IS PLAYING HIS CARDS VERY CLOSE TO HIS CHEST, AND EVEN HIS CLOSEST ADVISERS ARE TIGHTMOUTHED ON WHAT HIS CURRENT OBJECTIVES ARE. WE DO KNOW, HOWEVER, THAT HE IS FULLY CONSCIOUS OF THE EROSION OF HIS OWN
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PERSONAL POSITION IN THE COUNTRY, DUE TO FACT THAT WEAKNESS OF SOLH GOVT RESULTS IN HIS NOT RPT NOT BEING SHIELDED FROM PERSONAL PUBLIC CRITICISM.

(E) IN ANY EVENT, UNLESS A TRULY STRONG MOSLEM EMERGES (AND WE CANNOT SEE ONE ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL HORIZON), WHATEVER IS DONE WOULD CONTRIBUTE VERY LITTLE, IF ANYTHING, TOWARD ALLEVIATING THE CRITICAL PROBLEMS WHICH NOW BESET LEBANON IN VIRTUALLY EVERY ASPECT OF DAILY LIFE. MY OWN HUNCH, WHICH I ADMIT IS ONLY 60 TO 40 BET, IS THAT ONE OR TWO MEN MAY BE REPLACED IN CURRENT GOVT AND THAT WE WILL SEE CONTINUATION OF A TAKIEDDINE SOLH GOVT REPRESENTING THE SAME ELEMENTS AS ARE NOW ON HIS TEAM.
GODLEY

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